

Underground Railroad (IN)

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN PARKE COUNTY

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U.S.HISTORY TERM PAPER.

"The Underground Railroad."

The Underground Railroad was a term used to refer to an organized system existing in the northern states before the Civil War. This term was common, and it meant freedom, or a chance for freedom to the slaves of the South, and severe penalty to anyone who was caught aiding in this venture. The people aiding in this project were mostly Quakers. Any action taken for this cause was in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Laws, and many Southern legislatures and rich plantation owners offered rewards for the delivery of such sympathizers south of the Mason-Dixon line.

The actual name arose from the exaggerated use of the common railway terms. Levi Coffin and Robert Purvis were the 'presidents' of the road. Various routes were known as 'lines', stopping places were known as 'stations', those who aided the slaves along the routes were 'conductors', and the slaves themselves were referred to as 'passengers' or 'freight'.

The Quakers of Pennsylvania probably originated this plan, although it is not definitely known, but the most favored routes lay through Pennsylvania and Ohio to the Canadian border. Many negroes traveled these routes themselves and when it was safe would return to help others escape from slavery. The white sympathizers did not make so many trips into the slave territory, but Thomas Garret, by sheltering and caring for the people in his home, is said to have helped around two-thousand seven hundred (2700) slaves to freedom. There have been many estimates made of the number of slaves to reach freedom through the entire system, ranging from 40,000 to 100,000.

"originated and operated the first 'Underground Railroad' of the kind in America in 1819. His cousin Levi Coffin,³ who in after years became famed as an abolitionist, took his first lessons under"⁴ him.

Addison Coffin, the son of Vestal Coffin, moved from North Carolina to Parke County in 1843. Upon arrival he went first to Annapolis, which is about two miles north of Bloomington, to see his "old teacher, neighbor, and friend, Dr. Horace F. Cannon."⁵ Also there were several relatives on both sides of Coffin's family residing near Bloomfield and Annapolis. "Alfred Hadley's⁶ house was the Underground Railroad station on the Wabash route", states Addison," so I was among old neighbors, old friends and in connection with some old business, making new surroundings very agreeable."⁷

Although the Quakers were definitely against slavery, they were not radical abolitionists. Their pacific, religious doctrine forced them to shun any John Brown type of abolitionism. The Quaker attitude towards slavery seemed to center more around

³Levi Coffin moved to Newport (Fountain City), Indiana in 1826. He was eventually known as the "President" of the Underground Railroad.

⁴Addison Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin (Cleveland, Ohio: William G. Hubbard, 1897), p. 19.

⁵Dr. Horace F. Cannon was the father of "Uncle Joe" Cannon, Speaker of the house of Representatives from 1903 to 1911. Ibid., p. 73.

⁶Alfred Hadley was an "intimate friend" and co-worker of Addison Coffin's father back in North Carolina. Also in 1845 Addison married the eldest daughter of Alfred Hadley. Ibid., pp. 72, 95.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

escape from slavery and Christian charity towards their fellow men rather than towards any violent or immediate abolition of the institution. Joe Cannon recalls, in fact, that his "teachings at home were not against the continuance of slavery in the South," but rather he "was taught to get away from it if possible."⁸

To Levi Coffin "it was right to take in the stranger and administer to those in distress....The Bible bidding us to feed the hungry...said nothing about color."⁹ Thus the Friends felt they were doing right, and since their policy was to "assist the fugitive after he had made his escape and not to persuade him to run away....they felt no condemnation of conscience."¹⁰

In W. H. Siebert's comprehensive work on the Underground Railroad, the author has included a map of the various underground lines in Indiana about 1848. This map was constructed by Lewis Falley, whose father became connected with the Underground Railroad after 1841. Falley learned of the various routes from an "itinerant preacher who sometimes stopped as a guest at his fathers house."¹¹

On this map there are three main routes; an eastern one, a western one, and a center one. Also there are various secondary lines connecting the three main lines. Parke County, of course, was on "the western route which followed up the Wabash River to

⁸ Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon, p. 55.

⁹ Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin (Cincinnati, Ohio: Western Tract Society, 1876), pp. 107-108.

¹⁰ Julia S. Conklin, "The Underground Railroad in Indiana," The Indiana Magazine of History, Vol. VI, (June, 1910), p. 64.

¹¹ Wilber H. Siebert, The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898), p. 138.

La Fayette, where it crossed the river, proceeded to Rensselaer, and thence northeasterly to the Michigan line."¹² There was also a secondary route "between Brownstown and Bloomingdale"¹³ that connected the middle route with the Western route. The Wabash and Erie Canal would have led those fugitives to Parke County had they followed it from Evansville to Ohio.¹⁴

The operators of the station in Parke County no doubt early realized that the safety of both passengers and conductors depended upon complex routes and multiple hiding places. Consequently, although Alfred Hadley is credited with actually running the station, there were many other good folk who provided places of refuge and assistance for the fugitives.

Many slaves undoubtedly stayed at Thomas Morris' "White House" at Coloma, a few miles southwest of Bloomingdale. One can still see the Jethro Coffin home in Annapolis with its secret stairway located in a kitchen cabinet. At the first sound of any unfriendly intruders, the fugitives could slip up this hidden staircase, out onto a shed roof, jump down to the ground and scurry off to a cabin that lay between the property of Jethro Coffin and Alfred Hadley. This cabin was built by a runaway slave named Jimmy Henrietta. "It was used for sheltering other slaves, but conditions became so 'scary' that Henrietta did not remain long."¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁵ The Rockville (Indiana) Republican, September 2, 1926, p. 1.

There were several such log cabins in the area that served the same purpose. There was one on the Hadley farm that was run by Lewis Artis, a runaway slave.¹⁶

In spite of the danger involved, the station in Parke County seems to have operated smoothly. Its success was due to the ingenuity, organization, and level headedness of its operators. Addison Coffin worked for Alfred Hadley during the summer of 1844. He says the Wabash line at that time

was getting in good running order and passengers very frequent...the fugitives came and went like fleeting shadows, defying all efforts to detect or prevent. It was less difficult to find the way from one station to another, the roads were gradually being put on land though rough and muddy were straight and easy to follow, besides the stations were nowhere more than 20 to 30 miles apart and often friendly homes between."¹⁷

The number of fugitives that were received at the Bloomingdale station in its twenty-five years of existence is unknown. Mr. Hadley's daughter, however, stated that although most of the slaves were from Kentucky, "there were some from every slave state in the Union except one."¹⁸ She could remember as many as five fugitives arriving at one time, but they usually came one or two at a time.¹⁹

Sometimes the slaves arrived in a pathetic condition. They were supplied with needed clothes by the sympathetic residents of Penn Township. If they were sick Dr. Horace

¹⁶Rockville (Indiana) Tribune, July 29, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁷Addison Coffin, The Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, pp. 88-89.

¹⁸The Rockville (Indiana) Republican, October 17, 1917, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid.

Cannon treated them.²⁰

Since the journey was dangerous and trying, the slave who attempted to travel the Underground Railroad usually had to possess a fairly high degree of native intelligence and independence; consequently, many of the slaves who came through Parke County were formally assigned to household staffs in the South.

One such pair was a "young looking and well dressed"²¹ man and wife from Kentucky. Their owners had treated them well, but when they found out that the man was to be put up for sale, they decided to escape. Thus when their owner went away for a few days, leaving everything in the custody of the two negroes, the slaves arranged the household in order, and when it turned dark, they dressed in their best clothes and escaped.²²

The operators of any station faced opposition from the Southerners, who were trying to recover their lost property, as well as opposition from the pro-slavery elements in their own locality.

Since Parke County is located quite a distance north of the Ohio River, the fugitives had the most difficult part of their journey behind them by the time they reached Bloomingdale. It was not unusual, however, for slave owners to pursue their chattel as far north as Penn Township.

Often such slave hunters would pose as cattle buyers in

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

order to find the trail of their escaping negroes. Consequently the more valuable slaves were moved northward as soon as possible. Alfred Hadley had an "old-fashioned carriage"²³ which could be covered over to hide the fugitives as they travelled from station to station.

The journey was usually made at night. Often there were many routes leading out of a station. Thus when the slave-hunters followed on one road, the slaves were conveyed by another. In some instances the hunters were actually ahead of the fugitives.²⁴

Mrs. Hadley once delayed some slave hunters at her home while Mr. Hadley was transporting some valuable slaves to Crawfordsville. By cooking the hunters a chicken dinner, and by being cordially concerned about their comfort, she was able to give Mr. Hadley enough time to get the negroes out of danger before the hunters again took up the chase.²⁵

Alfred Hadley's daughter once recorded that the operators encountered "some opposition [To their work] for there was some pro-slavery sentiment even in the North."²⁶ This remark seems a slight understatement.

Not all of the emigrants who came from the South to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, p. 111.

²⁵ Emily Hobson, Interview with Lora Hobbs for Federal Worker's Project, 1937. (Paper on file at Dr. Donald Schieck's Office, Indiana State Teachers College, Terre Haute, Indiana). Lora Hobbs heard the story from the daughter of Alfred and Rhoda Hadley.

²⁶ The Rockville (Indiana) Republican. October 17, 1917, p. 1.

Parke County were of Quaker stock. A great many Southerners who settled in Rockville and surrounding communities still retained a favorable attitude towards slavery. Addison Coffin, in recalling local opposition to Underground Railroad activities in 1844, wrote:

a violent and almost murderous hostility of a majority of the community especially Rockville....the pro-slavery Hoosiers invariably spent much of the time in swearing what and how they were going to do, and they sought the fugitive when he was gone, and we quietly smiled and kept still."²⁷

In the middle 1840's a family of Friends living in the vicinity of Bloomingdale inherited some slaves and other property in the South. It was decided at a Friend's meeting that Dr. Horace Cannon was to go to Alabama and bring the slaves back to Parke County where they would be set free.

When he returned to Parke County with his cargo, a group of men at the river landing tried to prevent him from bringing the negroes on shore. Cannon quietly informed the group that he was going to bring the negroes on shore and anyone who opposed him would pay the price for trying to intimidate him.

The Captain of the boat slipped a pistol into his [Cannon's] hand, and placing himself at the head of the negroes,... marched down the gangplank. The sight of a Quaker with a gun in his hand, cocked and ready for use, was enough to convince the crowd he would shoot if necessary."²⁸

Local opposition to anti-slavery activities was not only expressed in threats and personal violence. Sometimes the law was used as an instrument for applying pressure to discourage helping the negro.

²⁷ Addison Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, p. 89.

²⁸ Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon, p. 53.

In the 1840's there was a state law on the books which prevented any person in Indiana from employing a colored person on whom a bond or security had not been posted. The purpose of such an act was to prevent the negroes from becoming wards of the state or county. Such a law ran contrary to Quaker consciences; consequently, when Dr. Cannon brought the inherited slaves up from Alabama, he refused to post a bond.

In April, 1847, the State of Indiana indicted Albert G. Coffin, William Morris, James K. Steele, James Siler, and Horace F. Cannon on the charge of "harboring a negro."²⁹ The State dropped it's charges against Coffin, Morris, and Steele.³⁰ James Siler was tried for the offence and found not guilty.³¹

Dr. Cannon had employed one of the freed negroes to help clear a field on his eighty acre farm. The negro had worked along side young Joe Cannon and his other brothers.³² The court found Dr. Cannon guilty of harboring a negro and assessed his fine as ten dollars, "for use of the County Seminary."³³ Cannon appealed the decision, but his "arrest of judgement" plea was overruled on April 20, 1848.³⁴ When Friends and

²⁹ Parke County Circuit Court, Civil Order Book. (August, 1845 to October, 1849), Vol IV, pp. 244-246.

³⁰ George Steele was still fined twenty-five dollars for failure to appear to answer the indictment. Ibid., p. 288.

³¹ Ibid., p. 296.

³² Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon, p. 54.

³³ Parke County Circuit Court, Civil Order Book, Vol IV, p. 244.

³⁴ Cannon also had to pay the cost of the prosecution amounting to sixteen dollars and twenty-seven cents. Ibid., p. 355.

political friends offered to pay the fine, Dr. Cannon refused. Instead the money was collected by a Sheriff's Sale of "a large part of his stock, horses, and cattle."³⁵

There were also occasions when the fugitives themselves were captured and tried for various crimes. In 1856, for example, a colored boy named Henry Harris, who was about nineteen years of age, was found guilty of horse stealing and sentenced to the penitentiary for two years. The boy was thought to be a fugitive on his way to Canada. "His trial," so reported a local newspaper, "excited much interest among the 'colored population' ³⁶ several of whom were present.... a petition is in circulation, praying to the Governor to pardon him."³⁷

There was one segment of the population in Parke County that was not pro-slavery, but yet they were certainly not demonstrative or active in expressing their anti-slavery views. Lukewarm Whig sentiments towards the institution of slavery gradually reached a boiling point as the differences of opinion between North and South became more acute. Shortly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the new Republicans became more vocal in their affirmation of Underground Railroad activities.

This transition may be seen as reflected in the local

³⁵ Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon, p. 54.

³⁶ It was not unusual for freed negroes to settle near Quaker communities. By 1856 there were some colored people residing around Bloomingdale.

³⁷ The True Republican (Rockville, Indiana), February 14, 1856, p. 2.

Republican newspaper. In November of 1850, for example, Parke County Whig quoted a story in negro dialect from the Boston Mail. The gist of this " 'sensible speech' " is that it was best not to support violence as a means of resisting the Southerners' attempts to recover their slaves, but rather an effort should be made " 'to raise a fund to help de fugitives to get out ob de way ob dem slave catchers.' " ³⁸ Also the same issue of the Whig recounted the story of two free negroes in Massachusetts who posed as fugitives in order to gain favors and sympathy from the abolitionists. ³⁹

In 1856, the renowned Republican political organ published a poem, "Flight of the Fugitive", which was written especially for the True Republican by Mary D. Vale. Mary's poem may be a bit gaudy now; nevertheless, she reflects a change of sentiment over six years.

House, every freeman, prepare for flight, and be ready to
 bleed for the fight;
 Strike, for the Fugitive stands at your door,
 Strike for his body is dripping with gore.
 House every mother, who feels for her child
 The slave mother calls you in accents so wild.
 Sister be ready to take to thy home
 The image of God, who is weary and worn. ⁴⁰

It has been almost a century since the Underground Railroad ceased functioning. In one respect perhaps the operators of the Bloomington station may have left their imprint not only on Parke County but on the whole country. From his chair as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Joe Cannon exercised

³⁸ Parke County Whig, November 15, 1850, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰ The True Republican, August 14, 1856, p. 1.

almost dictatorial powers over affairs of government in the early part of the 1900's. One author has written that "Uncle Joe was a Republican because he had been a Quaker whose relatives made crusade against slavery."⁴¹ Uncle Joe said himself that he was greatly influenced by his father's trial and attitude toward the slavery question. In 1926, Uncle Joe said:

I remember every detail of that first personal experience with the slavery question his father's trial. In recent years some of my critics have accused me of accepting too much responsibility....I would have been unworthy of that Quaker that sired me if I had tried to shirk the responsibility when the test came and...did not stand up for what counted.

The legacy of the Underground Railroad to the present is the knowledge that in troubled times, men can still have the faith and the determination to confidently and calmly stand up for the principles in which they believe. In 1926, a small memorial in honor of those who had maintained the Bloomingdale station was erected about one-half mile south from where the Alfred Hadley home stood. This monument, located on U. S. Highway 41, contains boulders from local pioneer farms. On some of these old farms fugitive slaves were often sheltered.⁴³ But perhaps a better symbol of the Underground Railroad was the idea expressed by the author of the article announcing the death of Alfred Hadley in 1873.

⁴¹Blair Holles, Tyrant from Illinois (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1951), p. 42.

⁴²Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon, p. 61-62.

⁴³The Rockville Republican, September 2, 1926, p. 1. Citing the Bloomingdale World.

The unselfishness of his nature was especially apparent in his life long efforts for the relief of the oppressed of every race or nationality often making pecuniary sacrifice in their behalf as well as imperiling his personal safety. He was their friend at a time when, not as now, it was no very popular thing--he dared to do right....⁴⁴

⁴⁴The (Rockville, Indiana) Republican. June 4, 1873, p. 2.

INDIANA STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN PARKE COUNTY

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The Underground Railroad line in Parke County was originated and maintained by the Society of Friends. For more than twenty-five years Quakers in the vicinity of Bloomington serviced an escape route which allowed the fleeing "persons of color" to reach Canada and freedom.

The Bloomington (or Bloomfield as it was called in its early years) monthly meeting was established in 1827,¹ but the big influx of the Quakers to Parke County was not until the 1830's and 1840's.

Many of the Bloomington Quakers migrated from the area of New Garden in Guilford County, North Carolina. These Guilford County Friends settled not only in Parke County but also in other parts of Indiana. It was largely through the conscientious labors of these pious North Carolina folk that the organized Underground Railroad in Indiana was created and developed.

These migrating Quakers began their exodus from the South because their Christian consciences were rubbed raw from contact with the institution of slavery.²

They brought with them to Indiana their previous experience gained in Underground Railroad activities. Vestal Coffin

¹H. W. Beckwith (compiler), History of Parke and Vigo Counties, (Chicago: 1880), p. 282.

²Joseph G. Cannon, Uncle Joe Cannon. As told to L. White Bushey, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), p. 7.

If a Negro was caught in a free state, such as Indiana, it made no difference whether he was a run-away slave or a free man. He would be taken to a slave state and tried before a Commissioner friendly to slavery. Any slave owner in the state would be named as his owner and he would be taken away without a chance to speak for himself. The kidnappers became more sure of themselves and captured even more negroes for which they would be highly rewarded. Many no-account men seeking an easy pay would strap pistols and whips to their belts and go in search of easy prey.

The sympathizers of the Negroes worked hard to defend them against such kidnappers and often went to great trouble. Such people were like Dr. John Posey and Rev. Eldridge Hopkins about whom the following story is told.

Along in the early part of the fifties, two free negro men who lived in Northern Kentucky, not far from Rockport, Indiana, had been working on the Wabash and Erie Canal for some time. They decided to go to their homes and while they were traveling they fell in with a very friendly appearing man. He told them that he knew of a man who was going almost to the Ohio in a wagon and if they would prefer it to walking they were welcome to ride. Mr. John Stucky saw these men whom the negroes were traveling with and since he recognized them, he hunted up Dr. Posey. They did some spying and found out that the men were kidnapping the negroes. As soon as possible they began following them and managed to get into a town far enough ahead of the wagon, that they could find a Justice of the Peace and get a writ issued to give them the right to stop the men. By this time Rev. Hopkins had joined them and the

group of men held a small court. The old Justice was against the negroes, and the kidnappers were able to bring forth enough false evidence to get by. While the men were talking near the wagon, Rev. Hopkins took a linch pin out of the wagon wheel. The kidnappers were released, but Hopkins got some men together and followed them. When the wagon broke down, the men were overpowered and tied up. Now having the advantage, Hopkins made them admit to their plan. For punishment he cut hickory poppling and let the negro men beat the kidnappers a certain number of times and then turned them loose to return to their homes. He gave the negro men the wagon and all the weapons, and they went on their way.

Many sympathizers were won by Harriet Beecher Stowe's writings. She took notes of things that she saw and heard from the slaves aided by her father, her husband and her friends.

Levi Coffin became widely known along different routes and slaves were sure of a welcome and shelter. Friends in the neighborhood who had been afraid to help, because of the penalty of the law, were encouraged to help when they saw Mr. Coffin's fearless manner and great success. Few would open their homes to the fugitives but many contributed clothing and volunteered their services in transporting the slaves to the next station on the route.

Levi Coffin, in his Memoirs, explained the details of the system as follows: "The roads were always in good running order, the connections were good, the conductors active and zealous, and there was no lack of passengers. Seldom a week passed without our receiving passengers by the mysterious road. We found it necessary to always be prepared to receive such company and properly care for them. We knew not what night, or hour of the night, we would be aroused by a gentle rap at the door. That was a sign announcing

the arrival of a train of the Underground Railroad, for the locomotive did not whistle or make any unnecessary noise. I have often been awakened by the signal, and sprang out of bed and opened the door. Outside in the rain or cold, there would be a two-horse wagon loaded with fugitives, perhaps the greater part of them women and children. I would invite them, in a low tone, to come in, and they would follow me into the darkened house without a word, for we knew not who might be watching or listening. When they were all safely inside and the door fastened, I would cover the windows, strike a light, and build a good fire. By this time my wife would be up and preparing victuals. In a short time the cold and hungry fugitives would be made comfortable. I would accompany the conductor of the train to the stable and care for the horses that had, perhaps, been driven twenty-five or thirty miles that night through the rain and cold. The fugitives would rest on pallets before the fire the rest of the night. Frequently wagon loads of passengers from the various lines have met at our house, having no previous knowledge of each other. The companies varied in number from two or three to seventeen.

In another part of Indiana, south of Kokomo, the district settled by Quakers, came to be known as the north central station. This town was generally considered the slave hunters last hope, for if a slave managed to reach this far north he was reasonably safe from capture. Very few fugitives were captured this far north.

In other parts of Indiana, ardent sympathizers of the slaves, strongly favored armed resistance to slave owners seeking to reclaim their property. The pursuit was often very close.

They had to resort to various systems in order to elude the slave hunters. Sometimes a large group of fugitives were scattered and hidden in the neighborhood until the hunters finally gave up the chase. Other times they were put on different routes and hurried forward with great speed.

The league had boats in which they transported the negroes across the Ohio River at five or six places and started them northward. The fugitives came shoeless and ill-clad to the homes of free negroes or whites. The women maintained a sewing circle to make suitable clothing for them; Benjamin Thomas gave a farm at Spartansburg, Indiana, for a school for the fugitives; some published anti-slavery papers, non-profit. William Lacey was one who patrolled the banks of the Ohio watching for escaping slaves to direct them to food and protection. Stores were operated that sold objects made by the fugitives; a lumber boat was maintained on Lake Michigan to carry fugitives to Canada; famous orators lectured on the subject and colored men told of their harrowing experiences. Many people detained the slave hunters as long as possible or directed them the wrong way to give slaves more time to escape. Often sympathizers were put in jail on mere suspicion. Songs were sung pertaining to this cause.

Many of the slaves came long distances, from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, in fact from all parts of the South. Sometimes they had been hunted and had been so long living in the woods and thickets that they were almost wild when they came in and so fearful

of being betrayed that it was some time before their confidence could be gained and the true state of their case learned.

Many facts of the system are revealed in some of the stories told by Levi Coffin.

The largest group ever in his house at one time numbered seventeen. The group was men and women all from the neighborhood of Kentucky, fifteen or twenty miles from the Ohio River, but belonging to different masters.

The group planned to escape, telling no one. At the assigned time they met and were taken across the river by a poor white man who operated a small boat on the river. Some of the slaves had saved money and their best clothes. After they were across they tried to find places to hide because they knew they would be pursued. They avoided traveling on the highways and went mostly through heavy woods. One day they saw horsemen at a distance and were chased through a corn field. Some of the slaves recognized the pursuers as their masters. They were shot at, but all managed to escape. Only about half were together, but they went to nearby woods hoping to meet again. While they were hiding they heard chopping near by and upon investigating found it to be a colored man. He took them to a safe hiding place and brought them food, as they had lost most of their possessions in the chase through the corn field.

The next night he took them to an underground railroad station in the Hicklin settlement. They were received kindly and Mr. Hicklin knowing that there were other slaves in the vicinity, hunted them up. The small group was discovered to be the other members of the party. Two of the men had minor gun wounds.

They fixed breakfast for them and assured them that they were safe. There had never been any fugitive captured in Fountain City.

They were taken to the home of Levi Coffin and there the wounds were taken care of.

They remained two days to rest and prepare to start again. Clothes and shoes were provided for them. When it was thought safe to travel, two wagons were secured and suitable conductors took them to the next station. They returned saying that they had made it safely. A messenger came after they left and said that fifteen slave hunters were in Richmond. Coffin sent a messenger to overtake them and have them scattered. The man from the last station knew where they were, and got a horse and overtook them. He had them scattered among friends to remain until the masters had given up the search and returned home. They came together again and were forwarded from station to station until they reached safety.

When they knew of no pursuit, and the fugitives needed to rest, to be clothed, were sick from exposure or fatigue, or were waiting for their party to regroup, Mr. Coffin has kept the slaves with him for weeks or even months. A case of this kind was that of two young men who were taken to the Coffin home during a severe cold spell in the early part of the winter. They had been out in the snow and ice, and their feet were so badly frozen that their boots had to be cut off, and they had to remain inside for three months, being unable to travel. Doctor Henry H. Way, who was always ready to minister to the fugitives, attended them, and by his skillful treatment their feet were saved, though for some time it was thought that a surgical operation would have to be performed. The two men left in the spring and went on to Canada. They seemed loath to leave the comforts of the home and manifested much gratitude for the kindness and care. The next autumn one of them returned to our house, saying that he felt so

much indebted to us that he had come back to work for us to try to repay us, in some measure, for what we had done for him. I told him that we had no charge against him and could not receive anything for our attention to him while he was sick and helpless, but if he thought he would be safe, I would hire him during the winter at good wages." He accepted this offer and proved to be a faithful servant. He attended night school and made some progress in learning. He returned to Canada in the spring.

Another story told by Mr. Coffin shows how his influence helped to win more people to the cause. Often if there is one person to lead, many will follow who would not have the initiative to go alone. Such is the case in the following story told by Mr. Coffin.

Once when I was in the city accompanied by my wife and daughter, Hiram S. Gillmore, a noted abolitionist and one of my particular friends, asked me if I knew of any person in from the country with a wagon who would take a fugitive slave girl out to a place of safety. He then gave me the outlines of her story. She had come from Boone County, Kentucky, having run away because she learned that she was to be sold to the far South. Knowing that she would be pursued and probably retaken if she started northward immediately, she conceived a plan like that adopted by Cassie and Emmeline when they ran away from Legree in Uncle Tom's Cabin. She hid herself in the interior of a large straw pile near her masters barn, having previously arranged apertures for air and a winding passage with concealed entrance by which her fellow servants who brought her food could enter. Here she remained six weeks, while her master with a posse of men scoured the country in search of her. Like

Cassie who looked from her hiding place in the garret and heard the discomfited Legree swearing at his ill luck as he returned from the unsuccessful pursuit, this young woman could hear in her hiding place in the straw pile the noise of horses' feet and the sound of talking as her master and his men returned from their fruitless search for her. When the hunt was over, she stole out and made her way safely to the Ohio River, crossed in a skiff, and reached the house of a family of abolitionists in Cincinnati, where she was kindly received and furnished with comfortable clothing.

In answer to the inquiry of Hiram S. Gillmore I replied that I was there in a carriage and would take her out if she would be ready when I called for her at nine o'clock next morning. At the appointed time we started. The young slave woman was nearly white, was well dressed, and presented quite a ladylike appearance.

At the end of the first day's travel we stopped about four miles above Hamilton, at a private house, the residence of one of my friends, a Democrat, by the way, who had often invited me to call at his house with my wife and pay a visit to his family. The gentleman's daughter ran out to meet us and I said to her: "Well, Ellen, I have brought my wife with me this time; Now guess which of these ladies she is."

She looked from one to the other, hardly able to decide, but finally, judging perhaps from the Quaker bonnet my wife wore, decided on the right one. The gentleman and his wife now came out to meet us, and when I introduced the young lady with us as a fugitive slave, they were full of surprise and curiosity, having never seen a fugitive slave before.

I told them her story and then said to my friend:

"Will she be safe here tonight, Thomas?"

"Irecon so," was the reply.

"I dont want any 'recon' about it," I rejoined; "I shall put her in thy care, and I dont want thee to let anybody capture her." She was kindly treated.

Next morning - it being the Sabbath day - we went on about eight miles to West Elkton, a Friend's settlement, to attend meeting and spend the day. Meeting had just commenced when we arrived. My wife took the fugitive into meeting with her and seated her by her side. This was the first time the girl had ever attended a Quaker meeting. At its close I introduced her to a number of our friends as a runaway slave from Kentucky. She was the first that had been seen at that place, and a mysterious influence seemed to invest her at once. Men lowered their voices as if in awe when they inquired about her, and some of them seemed alarmed, as if there was danger in the very air that a fugitive slave breathed. I spoke in a loud cheerful tone and asked: "Why do you lower your voices? Are you afraid of something? Have you bloodhounds among you? If so, you ought to drive them out of your village."

This public exposition of a fugitive slave at Friend's meeting and in the village seemed to have a good effect in the place, for West Elkton afterwards became one of our best underground railroad depots and the timid man first alluded to became one of the most zealous workers on the road.

The Reminiscences of Levi Coffin.

Parke County played an important part in this vast movement with its one 'depot'. This station was maintained at the home of Alfred Hadley, a Quaker in Penn Township. Not all of Mr. Hadley's neighbors were friendly to him and his purposes; however as that was a Quaker community, a large number of his neighbors did help

him by providing their services to aid the fugitives. It is said that there were never any slaves captured at Mr. Hadley's house, but some barely escaped.

About four or five miles north of Rockville on U.S. #41, is a marker standing in a grove of trees. This marker was dedicated August 26, 1926, to Alfred and Rhoda Hadley and the Friends of Bloomingdale, who aided in the Underground Railroad.

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3. Commager, Henry and Nevins, Allan. The Heritage of America; Boston, 1947.

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8. New International Encyclopedia p. 640.

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UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
8-12-61REFERENCE
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The Underground Railway Through Vigo County

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

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Hiding by day and traveling by night, the slaves were guided by "conductors" from one station to another until they reached safety. The most successful conductor was probably Harriet Tubman, who herself escaped from slavery in 1849. Going South again and again, always at the risk of her life, she managed to bring out over 300 of her people. One estimate puts the total number of runaways helped by the underground system at 75,000.

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In their struggle for freedom those who did manage to get this far could consider themselves nine-tenths free. To help these slaves in their effort to escape, men like Levi Coffin of New Port (now Fountain City), Dr. Adams of Petersburg and Col. J. W. Cockrum of Oakland City and other courageous leaders organized the Anti-Slavery League. The untiring efforts of this organization made the going easier. The Underground got its name from some of the hiding places such as the caves around Madison and Posey's coal mine near Petersburg.

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not always sure who their friends were, so they often chose stealth to the risk of betrayal. In some instances this led to their undoing. Beckwith gives the following account: "When Harrison's army was moving through the southern edge of Honey Creek township, two of his soldiers saw a couple of men, whom they mistook for Indians, skulking along in the edge of a grove. The soldiers opened fire, killed one of them and captured the other. They proved to be fugitive slaves. The one who survived was sent back to his slave plantation in Kentucky."

Ironically, this took place not too far from the Malcolm Steele homestead, said to have been built around 1817, and once a station of the Underground Railroad. When the house was undergoing remodeling, a secret stairway and secret rooms were found.

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Colored Colony In Lost Creek Township Interesting Settlement

DO August 29, 1937 T.H. TRIBUNE

Anna Bowles Wiley.

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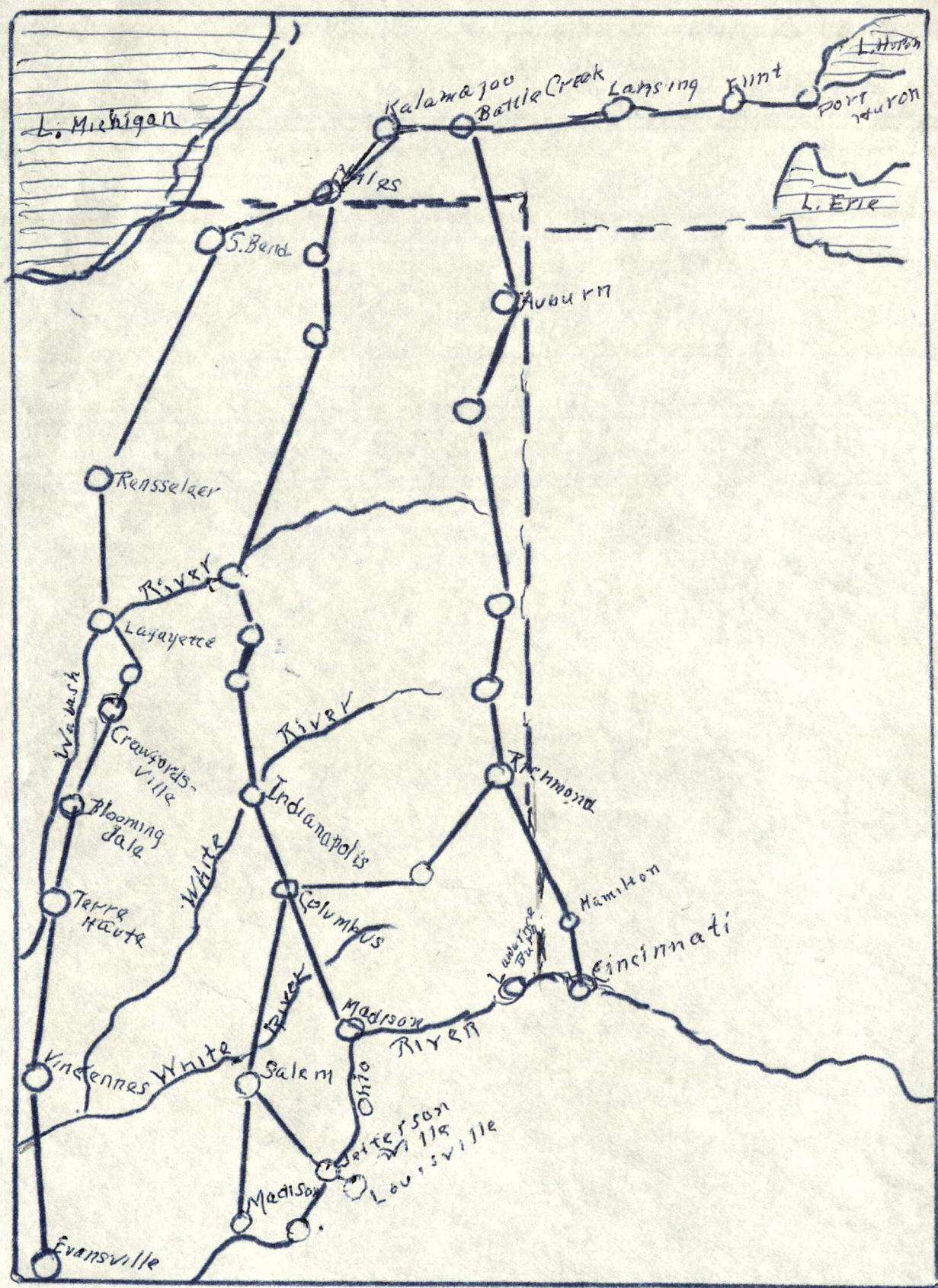
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3 routes of Underground Railroad
in INDIANA.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

BY JAMES W. COOPER.



THE underground railroad was an association of persons who were bitterly opposed to slavery and who had various lines and stations throughout the state to assist fugitives from slavery. My father, now deceased, was the keeper of the station at Russiaville for some years, and what I know about the underground railroad I learned from him and from the assistance I was called upon to give fugitives who came our way.

One thing that greatly hampered the underground people was the scarcity of money. Every one at that time had scarcely any money, and it took some money to forward a fugitive from one part of the country to another. The nearest station to ours on the south was Westfield, in Hamilton County. The next was New London, about two miles north of Russiaville. Among those engaged in the underground railroad business in this part of the country were D. D. Lightner, who afterward represented this county in the Legislature; Samuel Woody, Elwood Trublood, Campbell Evans; my father; James W. Cooper Sr., Elijah H. Johnson, George W. Thompson and Joseph Taylor, afterward sheriff of Howard County.

In assisting the slaves to escape from bondage they frequently incurred great personal danger and in addition to this the danger of the slave law, which made a man who refused to give assistance to a slave hunter liable to fine and imprisonment.

John Rhodes, a negro who had escaped from Missouri, was a man of gigantic

size. He brought his wife with him and located near the town of Westfield, where he built a cabin on some old abolitionist's land whose name I forget, and was living and working in that neighborhood.

It was probably about a year after he came there when word came to Russiaville by a runner that John Rhodes was besieged. The Rhodes cabin was a log structure built very low, with one room and one door. There was a \$300 reward offered for his capture and return to his master in Missouri. They broke the door down and Rhodes stood within the open door with ax in hand and declared he would cut down any man that laid hands on him; that he would rather die than go back to slavery. They told him if he did not surrender promptly that they would shoot him. He defied them to shoot and told them they would not get the reward they were seeking if they had only his dead body. They tried both force and strategy to get the advantage of old John.

Finally two of them climbed onto the roof of the house, and his wife, who was in the room, heard them coming down the chimney to get in the room by way of the fireplace. She immediately emptied a feather bed on the fire and in a short time the two fellows fell down almost suffocated. Old John threw them out and told them they could get more fresh air outside than in the house.

Within a short time afterward the reinforcements from Russiaville arrived on the scene, and after a counsel they advised Rhodes to surrender and told him they thought they could get him his liberty by law. John surrendered, and in his trial was declared free because a law of Illinois, into which he had been taken at one time, freed slaves who were carried into the state.

Some time, about the year 1855, one afternoon there came to our house a mulatto boy. He was a fugitive from Kentucky. He was almost exhausted with travel and hunger, and his feet were worn and sore. Mother fed him and gave him water to bathe his feet and gave him

a place to sleep. In the evening, just a little before night, three strangers rode into the little town and began to make inquiry if any one had any mules. It soon leaked out that they were in pursuit of the mulatto boy.

Father immediately sent a runner to Absalom Hollingsworth, a friend Quaker and active member of the underground railroad, telling him to send two of his sons, Barclay and Joseph, to the assistance of the boy, who was at our house. Just about dark the two boys arrived. Father went out to the barn and mounted a spirited gray mare, then put me on the back of a sorrel horse called Charlie, with the negro boy on behind me, put a cowhide in my hand and said to keep in sight of the gray mare. He instructed the Hollingsworth boys to keep in the rear and in case of any trouble to come to our assistance.

We rode out of Russiaville at breakneck speed, to the town of New London without a halt, across the Wild Cat River and into Ervin Township. We went to the home of an old negro man, whose name I think was Bass or Basset, and called him out. We took the boy out in a clearing where a large oak tree had fallen over, so as to make two large forks. We put that negro boy between those forks and built over him about the biggest brush pile you ever saw. We were careful to fix it so he could move around and lie down, and that when night came on he could get out and walk around and exercise. The colored people in the neighborhood brought him food and administered to his wants. He finally got away and went to Canada, where he remained until after the war, when there was no danger of being recaptured and taken back. He then returned to the United States and for many years was a conductor on a sleeping car out of Chicago. To my knowledge only one slave who passed through our station was ever recaptured. That was a girl about 22 years old, who was recaptured in Michigan and taken back to slavery, but immediately committed suicide.

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Emeline Fairbanks Mem. Library

INDIANA ROOM

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THERE WERE
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STATIONS
IN VIGO COUNTY

By: Morton A. Lewis

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These encumbrances notwithstanding, many, in their struggle for freedom, did get this far, and on northward to their destination. For a long time this journey was unorganized and haphazard. Moreover, Vigo County and Terre Haute area was not too remote from the southern half of Indiana, that house divided against itself. However slaves reaching Vigo County, having crossed

the White River, and the formidable intervening territory "could consider themselves nine-tenths free."

To help these slaves in their effort to escape, men like Levi Coffin (of New Port), now Fountain City, Dr. Adams of Petersburg, Col. J.W. Cockrum of Oakland City, and other courageous leaders organized the Anti-Slavery League. The untiring efforts of this organization made the going easier for men and women, fleeing bondage. Slave holders called the methods employed, The Underground Railroad. The only things literally underground were hiding places like caves around Madison, or Posey's coal mine near Petersburg.

Slave catchers and kidnappers of free Negroes, often wormed their way as far as Terre Haute, but the untiring efforts of the Anti-Slavery League, made such journey futile. Beckwith's county history mentions such an incident. Slave catchers had trailed a slave woman refugee to these parts. They had even offered a reward for her capture, but left without their human quarry.

Before the Anti-Slavery League was organized, runaway slaves found many professed friends not even remotely sincere, so they often chose stealth to the risk of betrayal. In some instances, this led to their undoing. Beckwith gives the following account: "When Harrison's army was moving through the southern edge of Honey Creek Township, two of his soldiers saw a couple of men, whom they mistook for Indians, skulking along in the edge of a grove. The soldiers opened fire, killed one of them and captured the other. They proved to be fugitive slaves. The one who survived was sent back to the slave plantation in Kentucky."

REFERENCE
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INDIANA ROOM

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THERE WERE
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STATIONS
IN VIGO COUNTY

By: Morton A. Lewis

There were three main branches of the Underground Railroad, crossing Indiana; from south to north. Of these three, the one approximating the Wabash River trails, and passing through Vigo County, was the least used by fugitive slaves. The segment of the "Underground" coming this way was fraught with risk and danger. For those who overcame, or survived these perils, Vigo County, and Terre Haute often became a haven.

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Ironically this took place not too far from the Malcolm Steel homestead, said to have been built around 1817, and once an Underground Railroad station. Malcolm Steel states that when this house, that had been purchased from the Jones family, was being remodeled, the outside measurement of a certain room failed to match that of the inside. It was also found that the difference in dimensions was due to a secret stairway. Secret rooms were also discovered.

The location of most Underground Railroad stations, of the Civil War Period, in this county, was a secret and will probably remain so. Personal knowledge of the local Underground Railroad stations is very difficult to find, after a lapse of one hundred years.

An article by Anna Bowles Wiley, (In The Terre Haute Tribune of Aug. 29, 1937) states that many runaway slaves found refuge in Lost Creek Colored Community hideouts. They were taken from these places to a station near Rockville, where agents took them on to Bloomingdale, etc.

Paul Anderson, now residing near Burnett tells me that one of these Lost Creek stations, was the home of George Anderson, his grandfather. This house still stands and is located on the Haythorne Avenue Road, about one mile west of the (Hunt), now called The Stop Ten Road. Anderson would transport the refugees in a two horse wagon. Paul says the station was Markles' Mill and from there they were conducted to Bloomingdale and thence to Canada.

However, I find some students of the Civil War Period, doubtful that Markles' Mill was involved, as an Underground Railroad Station. Notwithstanding, it is known that activities related to the Civil War, and some in secret, were carried on here.

The Terre Haute Tribune of July 18, 1909 (p.10, Cols. 1 to 3), carries an article as follows:

HOME GUARDS MEET IN MILL

"During wartimes there was an organization known as the "Home Guards." This body held its meetings, which were secret, night after night.

Men would come from within a radius of twenty-five miles to attend. During these meetings the mill would be closely guarded, and the machinery stilled. A man who was not a member, took his life in his own hands, if he ventured too near."

It is likely, that if these men were not a part of the "Underground," they made it safer for those who were.

To my own personal knowledge, I only knew one fugitive from slavery, Elias Lindley. He owned a two hundred acre farm in Nevins Township, on which, (by the way), I was born. I have often heard him laughingly tell of how he "joined the bird company" and fled the slave plantation in Kentucky. He came by way of Vanderburg, Gibson, Knox and Sullivan Counties. After hiding awhile in Terre Haute and vicinity, he made his way to Nevins Township.

Lindley made his home with the Roper family, some of whom were full blood Indians. He "hired out" among the white neighbors, and invested the money he earned in land. Later this former

refugee became a wealthy and respected farmer. He married Margaret Roper and gave her not too fortunate family a helping hand. Owning fast horses was his hobby. His race horse "Black Republican" at times raced on the McKeen track at Terre Haute.

The Lindley case could be an example of other probable instances never disclosed. Even in our present day, most people who uphold human dignity, discountenance hate campaigns, and the like, in matters of race, seldom noise it around. They simply play safe.